

John Davis Esq
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ADDRESS

OF THE

REPRESENTATIVES

OF THE

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS,

COMMONLY

CALLED QUAKERS,

IN

PENNSYLVANIA, NEW JERSEY, DELAWARE, &c.

TO THE

CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES.

PHILADELPHIA :

JOSEPH & WILLIAM KITE, PRINTERS.

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1837.



Friends Society of Philadelphia
Meeting

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At a Yearly Meeting of Friends held in Philadelphia, by adjournments from the 17th of the Fourth month, to 21st of the same, inclusive, 1837.

THE suffering condition of our fellow men, descendants of the African race, who are subjected to the rigours of unconditional slavery, having long engaged the sympathy and commiseration of this meeting, the subject was referred at our last annual assembly, to the serious attention of the Meeting for Sufferings. An address to the citizens of the United States, prepared by that meeting, was now introduced by the reading of their minutes, bringing into view the injustice of slavery, the enormities which it authorises by the traffic in the persons of men, extensively prosecuted within the United States, and the degradation of morals unavoidably attendant on such an unrighteous system, wherever it is tolerated; and inviting our fellow-citizens to a calm and dispassionate examination of this momentous subject, with a sincere desire to act in conformity with the principles of universal righteousness, in according to that people the enjoyment of their natural and religious rights;—as likewise the numerous and complicated injuries inflicted on the aborigines of our country, and the duty incumbent upon us of endeavouring to extend to the feeble remnant of these once numerous tribes, the benefits of civilized life and religious instruction:—which address being read and deliberately considered, was approved; and that meeting was directed to procure the printing of such number as they may judge needful for general distribution.

Extracted from the Minutes,

WILLIAM EVANS, *Clerk.*

ADDRESS.

TO THE CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES.

OUR minds have been seriously impressed with considerations relative to the present condition and future prospects of our country. In venturing to address our fellow-citizens on subjects of vital importance to the community, we trust we shall not be suspected of acting from party or political motives, or of desiring to excite a feeling of antipathy towards any class of our fellow men. Our object is the promotion of the general good and the performance of our religious duty. Our principles are well known to be pacific, consistent, as we firmly believe, with the doctrines of the gospel, which breathes "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good will to men." It has frequently been our concern to counsel our members to abstain as much as possible from engagements, either alone or in connexion with others, which lead to strife and contention; and to preserve towards all men a demeanor conformable to our religious profession. As we cannot resort to violence ourselves to obtain or secure our most dear and unquestionable rights, so we cannot countenance riotous or tumultuous proceedings in others, for the attain-

ment of any object, however just or desirable ; yet we hold it to be a civil and religious right to raise our voice against injustice and oppression, whether extended to ourselves or to others. That national as well as individual transgressions are sooner or later visited by Divine judgments, is fully attested by the sacred records. And believing as we do, that injustice and oppression are practised by many in this land, we are induced to open our mouths for the dumb, and to plead the cause of those who have neither the means nor the power to plead for themselves.

In the early settlement of this country, the practice of importing and holding African slaves was incautiously introduced, and some of our predecessors in religious profession, as well as others, fell into it ; but its utter repugnance to the precepts of the gospel, and the natural rights of man, was soon perceived, and long before the close of the last century, an union of sentiment and practice on this subject was effected throughout the society. Having, upon religious grounds, cleared ourselves of holding our fellow men in slavery, we have believed it to be our duty from that period to bear our testimony against it, without being swayed by considerations of interest or policy. As our opinions and principles in relation to the rights of this people are not new, so they are unchanged, being founded, as we believe, on a basis which is fixed and immutable.

When we reflect that there are now within the United States, upwards of two millions of human beings detained in slavery ; who are held as goods and chattels, the pro-

perty of other human beings, having similar passions with themselves; that they are liable to be sold and transferred from hand to hand, like the beasts that perish; that more than thirty thousand are annually sold and removed from the land of their birth to regions further south and west, and this not in families, but in companies composed chiefly of youths from twelve to twenty-five years of age, the nearest connexions of life being thus frequently torn asunder; that the District of Columbia, under the exclusive legislation of Congress, is one of the scenes of this disgraceful commerce; that the jails of the metropolis are used to confine the victims of this traffic, who are thus incarcerated, not because of their crimes, but because of the crimes of others, their slavery being the consequence of injuries inflicted by the hand of violence on themselves or on their ancestors; when we further reflect, that in several, if not in most of the slave-holding states, the slaves are systematically excluded from the means of improving their minds—that in some, even teaching them to read is treated as a crime; and that all these things are found among a people loudly proclaiming the freedom and equality of their laws—a people professing the benign religion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who came to make an end of sin, to finish transgression, and in the room thereof to bring in everlasting righteousness; who has taught us that he regards the injuries done to the least of his children as done to himself; and has commanded us to love one another, and to do to all men as we would that they should do unto us—well may we inquire, Shall not the Lord visit for these things? Shall not his soul be avenged on such a nation as this?

We earnestly solicit the attention of our fellow-citizens to this momentous subject. These people are our fellow creatures ; and their condition among us demands our serious consideration. We know not the time when those scales, in which mountains are weighed, may turn. The parent of mankind is gracious. His care is over the smallest of his creatures ; and a multitude of men escape not his notice. And though many of them are trodden down and despised, yet he remembers them. He sees their affliction, and looks on the increasing exaltation of the oppressor. He turns the channels of power, humbles the most haughty people, and give deliverance to the oppressed, at such periods as are consistent with his infinite wisdom and justice. If we disregard the claims of mercy and justice in the season of prosperity, and employ our superior advantages of knowledge and power, not for the glory of the Giver and the good of men, but to degrade and depress a large part of his rational creation, below the station for which they were designed, it may be "by terrible things in righteousness that he will answer us" in this matter.

If we look back to the period when the people of these United States assumed their station among the nations of the earth, and advert to the principles then solemnly proclaimed in the face of the world, we find them totally irreconcilable with the maintenance of slavery. Liberty was then declared to be an inalienable right, conferred by the Creator himself. No intimation is given, that personal freedom is the boon of society, the creature of law, to be granted or withheld at the caprice of the wealthy and powerful. No

exception is made; and, indeed, none could be made, on account of colour or previous condition, without rendering the whole passage absurd. This avowal was made by those who resided where slavery was most predominant, as well as where it was least. It is remarkable that at the period in question, slavery was tolerated in every State of the Union, and yet the delegates in Congress assembled, ventured to sweep away its foundation at a stroke. In some of the States these principles were soon after carried into effect, by the immediate extinction of slavery, and in others, provision was made for its eventual abolition. As these doctrines have not been disavowed by the authority of any section of our country, we believe that consistency, even looking no higher, requires that slavery should cease from every part of our government.

By a series of legislative enactments, Congress has expressed its abhorrence of the African slave trade. In 1820 this traffic was denounced as piratical, and the punishment of death was prescribed for any person within our jurisdiction, who should be found engaged in it. Yet a traffic partaking of the character of this, and combining many of its atrocities, is prosecuted in the interior of our own country. If the foreign slave trade was prohibited, because of its iniquity, surely the domestic trade ought not to be tolerated. If the reduction of the unoffending natives of Africa into servitude, or the act of conveying them in that character across the Atlantic, is a crime to be punished with death, the detention of them, or their descendants, in slavery, and the traffic in their persons within the United States, cannot be innocent: and the

continuance of the practice demands our serious consideration.

It must be admitted, as a fact, which we can neither disguise nor conceal, that slavery, wherever it prevails, exercises an influence unfavourable to religion and morals, both among masters and slaves. With regard to the latter, it is, perhaps, universally admitted. Degrade the human character and intellect as we will, there is still an inextinguishable sense of the injustice of slavery. Hence, discontent and frequent irritation are its inseparable attendants. The obsequiousness required to the commands, however unjust or capricious, of those who control them, renders the maintenance of independent virtue almost, if not altogether, impossible. In all communities, the virtue of the people depends very much on the education of the young; but what education can the slave possibly bestow on his offspring, even supposing him capable of it, where parents and children are under the absolute domination of others, who consider their own interest promoted by the debasement and ignorance of their slaves? It is not probable that much sense of justice and of the rights of property, can be maintained amongst a people who see their own earnings appropriated without their consent to the accommodation of others. A scrupulous regard to the sanctity of the marriage covenant cannot be expected, where the connexion is liable to be broken at any time, as the interest, will, or wants of the master may suggest.

That the system is deleterious to the masters as well as

the slaves, is equally true. The possession of irresponsible power, and the consequent temptations to its abuse, have a strong tendency to injure the moral feelings of its possessor. Whatever degree of humanity may be mingled with its exercise, it is obvious that the condition to which it applies could not possibly exist, if the injunction of our blessed Redeemer were duly regarded; "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets." Let it be remembered, that every departure from sound Christian principle, impairs our sensibility to right and wrong, and prepares the way for other and more glaring deviations. And as the sense of religious obligation declines among any people, the standard of morals will unavoidably sink. The exclusion of the slaves from the opportunity of enlarging and improving their minds, by learning to read the Holy Scriptures, must exert an unhappy influence upon the masters. How can they entertain a high sense of religious obligation, and pursue with assiduity the improvement of their own minds in piety and virtue, while they are carefully excluding their humble dependants from this invaluable advantage? How can they lift up their hands in prayer to the God and Father of mercies for his blessing on themselves and their offspring, and for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom on earth, while they endeavour thus to debar a part of his creatures, equally with themselves the objects of his redeeming love, from those means of attaining a knowledge of the doctrines and principles of the Christian religion?

Light is spreading among the nations of Christendom on the subject of human rights, and most of them have adopted measures to extirpate the slave trade. Some important movements have recently been made towards the extinction of slavery in a number of the West Indian islands, so that we may now reasonably conclude, that at no distant day the islands in the American Archipelago will be chiefly cultivated by freemen. This must increase the odium as well as the difficulty of maintaining the institution of slavery here. It is not to be supposed that those who have cleared their hands of the practice, and who hail with satisfaction the light that is opening on the subject, will again consent to return to so iniquitous a system, or cease to support the principles which they have adopted from a conviction of their conformity to reason and truth. If then a portion of our citizens tenaciously adhere to a system thus abhorrent to the feelings of others, and to the principles which all have concurred to applaud, bickerings and jealousies can scarcely fail to arise and seriously disturb the harmony of our necessary intercourse. Indeed, it requires but little attention to the events of the day to perceive, that the existence of slavery is now exerting an influence highly prejudicial to the peace of our country. The responsibility of contributing, as citizens of our common government, to support this unrighteous institution, and thus degrading the afflicted descendants of Africa, nearly to a level with the brute creation, is felt by many conscientious Christians to be serious and weighty ; hence, they cannot but desire that the subject may increasingly engage the solemn deliberation of their fellow-citizens,

more particularly of those who, from the possession of power or influence, may be enabled to promote their liberation.

To behold this portentous cloud spreading and thickening with the progress of time, and every effort to dissipate it strenuously resisted, fills our minds with gloomy forebodings for ourselves and for our country, and more particularly for those immediately implicated in the evil of slavery. We are not about to dictate in what manner slavery shall be finally extinguished, but we believe it is obligatory on those who hold their fellow men in bondage, to enter into a solemn examination of the subject. When they have been aroused by the appearance of danger, to enter into a close inspection of the nature and consequences of slavery, their voices have been as loud, and their declarations as forcible in reprobation of the practice, as those of any people among us. The testimony of one of their own statesmen was then felt and acknowledged. "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever; that, considering numbers, nature and natural means only, a change of circumstances is among possible events; that it may become probable by supernatural interference. The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest." Under such circumstances, we have seen a disposition to clear themselves of the evil as a means of escaping its consequence. A practice, which, in the moment of danger, appears unjust and iniquitous, must be equally so when that danger is withdrawn from the view. To arrive at a correct conclusion on this

awfully momentous subject, it is necessary that the demands of interest and the clamours of passion should be silenced, and a sincere desire cultivated to pursue such course as may be consistent with the Divine will and the promotion of universal righteousness. With such desires steadily maintained, we firmly believe that the light of truth, the Spirit of our blessed Redeemer, which can neither deceive nor be deceived, would manifest the necessity and the mode of breaking the yoke and letting the oppressed go free. Whatever prejudice may assert, or sophistry attempt to establish, the inconsistency of slavery with universal righteousness, is too obvious to every enlightened mind to admit of dispute. And to suppose that the wickedness and cupidity of man are capable of introducing an evil into civil society, which the light of the gospel and the labours of the devoted followers of Christ are incompetent to remedy, is to distrust the power and the moral government of our gracious Creator. If with an eye to the teachings and leadings of the Spirit of truth, we pursue the course which our duty as men and Christians requires, we may rely on the wisdom and goodness of God, who governs all consequences, to reward our endeavours and bless the work of our hands.

We would also invite the attention of our fellow-citizens to the condition of those descendants of the African race who are free. It is sorrowfully true, that in many parts of our country they are subject to unjust and oppressive restrictions, which are not applied to persons of our own colour; and that their personal freedom is liable to be

wrested from them by the operation of unequal laws. In nearly every part of the United States, they are the objects of cruel prejudice, which tends to produce that very degradation, which it assumes as its justification. That the benefits of education are rendered more difficult of access to them than to the youths of our own complexion, is well known. We apprehend that not only our religious duty, but our interest, as we value the peace and good of civil society, requires that we should manifest our gratitude, for our own superior advantages, by labouring to promote the improvement of this part of the human family; that we should cultivate feelings of true Christian benevolence towards them, and prepare them, as far as example and assistance can effect it, for civil and religious usefulness.

There is yet another class of our fellow men whose multiplied wrongs have excited our tender commiseration. We allude to the aborigines of our country,—once the undisputed proprietors of this extensive continent, but many of them now driven from the homes of their fathers, in defiance of the claims of justice, and the faith of treaties, to seek a precarious subsistence in distant and uncultivated regions. If we advert to the condition of these people when our ancestors first settled among them, the kindness manifested by many of those, then numerous and powerful tribes, towards their feeble visiters, and the various complicated acts of injustice since meted to them, we must acknowledge that a heavy load of guilt rests on our country. We earnestly desire that the people of the

United States, the present occupants of land from which the Indians have been expelled, by means abhorrent to justice and humanity, may duly consider the debt which our ancestors and ourselves have incurred, and extend to them, in their wilderness abode, the aids of science and the benefits of literary and religious instruction. The feeble remnant still remaining on this side of the Mississippi, are no less the proper objects of our care and benevolence. We believe it to be our religious duty to discountenance the attempts of avaricious men to dislodge them, either by violence or fraud, from the remaining scanty pittance of their once ample possessions ; and that it is obligatory upon us to endeavour to improve their condition by instruction in the arts of civilized life, and to inculcate on their minds the excellency and importance of the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Finally, it is our sincere desire and prayer, that it may please the Sovereign Ruler of nations, to influence the hearts of those who are placed in authority to seek for his counsel, and incline the inhabitants of these United States to feelings of tenderness for the oppressed, that there may be a hearty co-operation between the people and our rulers, in according to all, without distinction of nation or colour, the free enjoyment of their civil and religious rights. Thus we may hope to experience the fulfilment of the evangelical prophecy, “ I will make thine officers, peace, and thine exactors, righteousness ; violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders ;” and that the Most High will

still extend to our country the blessings of harmony and peace, and make us a light to the surrounding nations.

Signed in and on behalf of a Meeting of the Representatives of the Religious Society of Friends, commonly called Quakers, in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, &c., held in Philadelphia, the 14th of the Fourth Month, 1837.

JONATHAN EVANS, *Clerk.*

